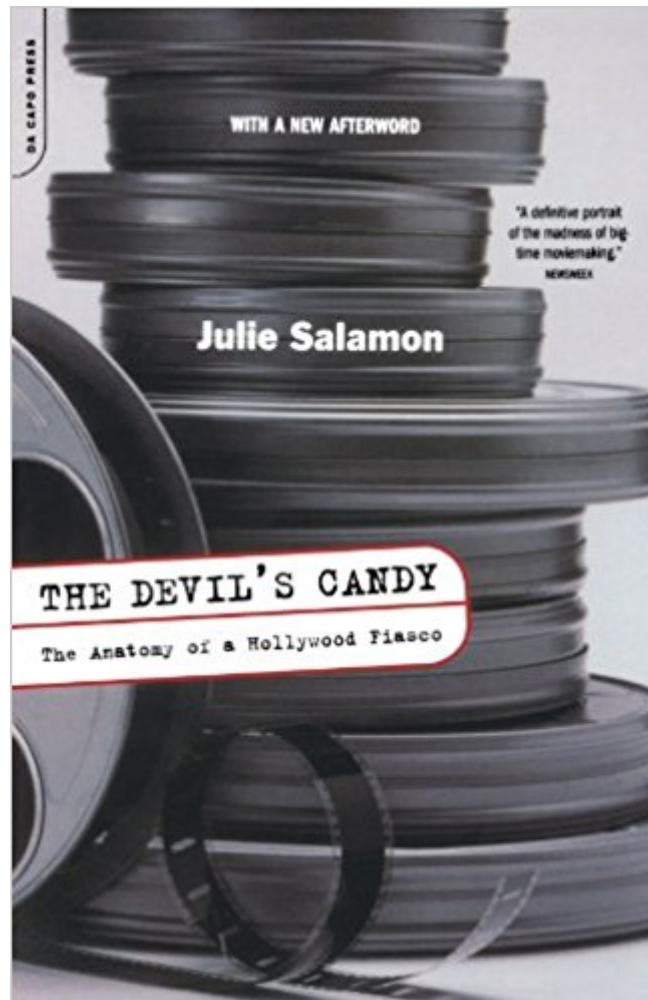




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# The Devil's Candy: The Anatomy Of A Hollywood Fiasco



## Synopsis

When Brian De Palma agreed to allow Julie Salamon unlimited access to the film production of Tom Wolfe's best-selling book *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, both director and journalist must have felt like they were on to something big. How could it lose? But instead Salamon got a front-row seat at the Hollywood disaster of the decade. She shadowed the film from its early stages through the last of the eviscerating reviews, and met everyone from the actors to the technicians to the studio executives. They'd all signed on for a blockbuster, but there was a sense of impending doom from the start—heart-of-gold characters replaced Wolfe's satiric creations; affable Tom Hanks was cast as the patrician heel; Melanie Griffith appeared mid-shoot with new, bigger breasts. This riveting insider's portrait provides a timeless account of an industry where art, talent, ego, and money combine and clash on a monumental scale.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Salamon chronicles the making of the film version of *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, one of Hollywood's all-time biggest flops. Photos. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Salamon, film critic for *The Wall Street Journal*, was given seemingly unlimited and early entree to the production of Brian De Palma's film version of Tom Wolfe's novel *The Bonfire of the Vanities*. This is apparently the first time a writer has been allowed such unfettered access to the creation of a film since Lillian Ross wrote *Picture* (LJ 10/1/52) based on the filming of *The Red Badge of*

Courage (1951). Wisely, Salamon's narrative includes not only De Palma and the leading actors, but lesser-known contributors such as the costume designer, production assistants, and location scouts. She is adept at interweaving all viewpoints and activities into the whole. Although the film was a colossal failure, for reasons which Salamon makes very clear, the book is an eminently readable success.- Roy Liebman, California State Univ. Lib., Los AngelesCopyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Fascinating insight on the making of a (flop) blockbuster. The Bonfire of the Vanities was a phenomenon as a book and was always going to be tough to turn into a movie. Julie Salamon's book follows the process from promising beginning to its sorry end. The likes of Brian de Palma, Tom Hanks (badly miscast) and Morgan Freeman come across OK, Melanie Griffiths seems extremely fragile, while Bruce Willis (very badly miscast) is portrayed as reclusive and demanding. His response to the book and threats against Salamon speak for themselves. The politics and pressures of big budget filmmaking have rarely been revealed in such detail. Even if you don't like the movie (and who did?), this is an eye-opening account.

I never could understand why BONFIRE OF THE VANITIES was such an incredibly awful movie, as the book was so substantial. There was blatant miscasting, chopped up stories and plot points. This book explains it all. The actors cast in the major roles, while excellent actors, were so decidedly wrong for the parts that they just couldn't overcome all the other disasters created while filming this mess. Besides, after reading this fascinating inside story of the making of a movie, one wonders how any movies get made at all.

Love behind-the-scenes books. This is a good one. Made me go back and read "Bonfire" for the 3rd time and got more out of it than ever. Also made me recommend it to S.O. One detail: changing the judge from a fiery Jew to the typical Morgan Freeman black man with a halo messed up the budget, the timing, and the dynamics of race relations that formed the heart of the book. And Willis was no Peter Fallow (picture him more as a Christopher Hitchens type.)

I'll start by saying that I have never read Tom Wolfe's 'The Bonfire of the Vanities,' nor have I seen the movie. But I am fascinated with what takes place behind the scenes in Hollywood. All I'd heard about the movie was that it wasn't like the book and it was a bomb. That fueled my curiosity, so I picked up this book. Julie Salamon's unfettered access is something I'd never see before (and I

doubt any other director will grant it again). The amount of bureaucracy involved in making a film is utterly fascinating. Much more than I expected there to be. If you're interested in the movie-making process, pick this up. If you're interested in the behind-the-scenes of Hollywood politics, pick this up. It's an interesting read, wonderfully paced, and I recommend it.

First rate account of the making of Brian De Palma's *Bonfire of the Vanities*. Salamon, at the time a reporter for the *Wall Street Journal*, received what appears to have been total access to director De Palma, the actors, costume designers, cameramen, and practically everyone else involved in the making of the movie. The level of detail may be too much for someone looking for a quick account of what went wrong in the making of this film, but I found it all fascinating. The only other book I know of that provides a comparably detailed inside look at the making of a movie is Lillian Ross's *Picture*, which was an account of the making of John Huston's *Red Badge of Courage* in 1951. A fair amount has changed in movie making since this book was written. For instance, Salamon devotes considerable time to following the second unit director as he attempts to set up some difficult shots, one involving the landing of a Concorde jet at sunset. These days, I imagine most movie goers would assume such a shot was actually cgi. I read the Da Capo Press 2002 reprint. (Interestingly, the subtitle of the book changed from "The Bonfire of the Vanities Goes to Hollywood" to "The Anatomy of a Hollywood Fiasco." Probably an indication that this film had been largely forgotten by 2002.) The reprint edition has an afterword that briefly discusses the reception of the book -- Bruce Willis was livid -- and the impact of the film on the careers of De Palma and the other people who are the focus of the book. Unfortunately, the photos from the first edition are not reproduced and the quality of the printing is a little off. Whatever reproduction technique was used imparted a bit of waviness to many of the lines of text.

I saw a description of this book as a guilty pleasure and I find that accurate. It's not particularly nourishing but as an account of the weird and wacky world of modern studio filmmaking, it's just fascinating. Too long by 100 pages and that tries one's patience but still a worthwhile read.

Whatever your feelings about the movie and book *Bonfire of the Vanities* (I considered the movie unworthy of its "disaster" label though it failed to capture the tone or message of the book); regardless of what you think of De Palma films (I never watched one that didn't at least interest me on some technical level and many are my favorites); if you love movies this book will hold your interest all the way to the end. It gave me an appreciation for the exciting and exhausting challenge

of film making.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. I also recently read "What Just Happened?" which is a somewhat similar book, albeit written by a producer rather than an observer. I wondered at some points throughout this work if and/or HOW the author could have been at so many places to record what was going on and what was said. That fact wasn't terribly clear in the beginning or throughout. I still enjoyed it, despite small reservations about the validity of the information. I don't doubt the information is more or less completely true, just the amount of detail provided on the thoughts of each person seemed unlikely as this book leaves nothing sacred. Perhaps some of the thoughts of the characters were obtained through personal interview; however, if so, I wish that would have been clearly stated. Especially helpful was the "Cast of Characters" listed in the front of the book. There are so many people to follow in this story that it was very helpful to be able to flip back and remind myself of "who was who". Overall, a very enjoyable and seemingly accurate read on the movie-making process of the late 80s and early 90s.

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